

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7183

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI

SUBJECT: CLUB NINETEEN: THE SEARCH FOR A SOUTHERN ALTERNATIVE

REF: (A) LAGOS A-64, (B) LAGOS 6549

1. DURING THE PAST FIVE MONTHS, A MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE WITHIN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY HAS BEEN AN AD HOC GROUP OF SOUTHERN AND MIDDLE BELT MCAS WHICH HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS "CLUB 19." IN VARIOUS BATTLES IN THE CA, CLUB 19 HAS ORGANIZED ITS FORCES AND WON A SUCCESSION OF VICTORIES, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH WAS THE DECISION BY THE CA TO REMOVE THE PROVISION FROM THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WHICH CALLED FOR A FEDERAL SHARIA COURT OF APPEAL.

2. IT NOW APPEARS THAT CLUB 19, WITH THE CONCLUSION OF THE CA'S ACTIVITIES, WILL TRANSFORM ITSELF INTO A POLITICAL PARTY WITH THE AIM OF ALLOWING THE SAME FORCES WHICH CONTROLLED THE CA TO PLAY A LEADING ROLE IN ELECTORAL POLITICS UNDER CIVILIAN RULE. PART OF CLUB 19'S CURRENT ACTIVITY IS BEING DIRECTED AT SETTING UP BRANCHES
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AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. FOR EXAMPLE, THE MAY 31 PUNCH REPORTED THAT CLUB 19 LEADERS HELD A MEETING RECENTLY IN BENIN CITY TO ESTABLISH ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT BENDEL STATE. ACCORDING TO THE PUNCH ACCOUNT, THE MEETING, WHICH WAS CHAIRED BY BENDEL MCA OMO OMORUYI, WAS ATTENDED BY A NUMBER OF CLUB MCAS AS WELL AS BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS FROM ALL THIRTEEN LGAS

IN BENDEL STATE. THE STORY ADDED THAT NOTHER BRANCH OF THE CLUB WAS BEING SET UP IN OWERRI.

3. MEMBERSHIP IN THE CLUB WITHIN THE CAS HAS APPARENTLY COME FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE COUNTRY OUTSIDE OF THE HAUSA FAR NORTH, OR AS MIDDLE BELT MCA JOUHN CHUWANG (PLATEAU) TOLD US, "IT IS REALLY CLUB 14 AND NEVER HAS ANY HOPE OF BEING CLUB 19." BUT FROM OUTSIDE THE NORTH, THE MEMBERSHIP IS FAIRLY ECUMENICAL, REPORTEDLY INCLUDING MIDDLE BELT LEADERS SUCH AS PAUL UNONGO AND SOLOMON LAR, IBOS SUCH AS SAM MBAKWE AND C.C. ONOH, OTHER EASTERNERS SUCH AS OBI WALI AND IME EBONG, AND ANTI-AWOLOWO YORUBAS CHIEF S.A. ONITIRI AND CHIEF OLU AKINFOSILE.

4. IF IT TRANSFORMS ITSEL SUCCESSFULLY NTO POLITICAL PARTY, CLUB 19 WILL ATTEMPT TO OPERATE WITH A "SOUTHERN STRATEGY" (REF B) OF UNITING AS FAR AS POSSIBLE THE ENTIRE SOUTH AND THE MIDDLE BELT. MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT ITS MOST FORMIDABLE OBSTACLE IN THAT ENDEAVOR WILL BE CHIEF AWOLOWO, WHO IS UNACCEPTABLE TO CLUB 19 POLITICIANS AS A POTENTIAL LEADER BUT WHO ALSO SHOWS NO SIGNS OF DISAPPEARING FROM THE SCENE. (COMMENT: IT'S PROBABLY NO COINCIDENCE THAT THE AUTHOR OF THE AMENDMENT PROBABLY AIMED AT AWOLOWO, TO CHANGE THE DATE ON THE BAN ON CORRUPT POLITICIANS FROM 1965 TO 1960 WAS CLUB 19 FIGURE AMO OMORUYI (REF B) END COMMENT.) AS A SYMPATHETIC IBO MCA TOLD US, "CHIEF AWOLOWO IS CONFIDENTIAL

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THE GEORGE WALLACE OF NIGERIAN POLITICS" IN THE SENSE THAT HE IS ANATHEMA TO THE NORTH AND BITTERLY DIVIDES THE SOUTH. IN THAT SENSE, AWOLOWO IS "THE BEST FRIEND THE NORTH HAS" BECAUSE IF HE INSISTS ON RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT, THE SOUTH WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE DIVIDED.

5. A SECOND PROBLEM WHICH CLUB 19 MUST FACE IS ITS OWN LEADERSHIP SITUATION. AS CHUWANG AND MCA GEORGE HOMMKWAP (PLATEAU) TOLD US, THE GROUP HAS TRIED TO DOWNPLAY THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL LEADERS IN ITS EFFORT TO FORM UNITY AROUND INTERESTS RATHER THAN TO BUILD A PARTY AROUND A LEADER. IN TIME, LEADERSHIP WILL SUPPOSEDLY EMERGE; HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AT THE SAME TIME THE UNANOINTED MAY LOOK FOR MORE PROMISING ALLIANCES AND TAKE THEIR TROOPS WITH THEM.

6. COMMENT: DESPITE THESE PROBLEMS, CLUB 19 IS AS CLOSE TO SOMETHING NEW ON THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL HORIZON AS ANYTHING WE HAVE SEEN SO FAR. THE SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF ITS EFFORTS TO INSTITUTIONALIZE THE FORCES WHICH WON THE SHARIA VICTORY INTO A PERMANENT SHIFT IN THE FOCUS OF POWER IN THIS COUNTRY WILL HAVE A

MAJOR IMPACT ON WHAT HAPPENS IN 1979. IF CLUB 19 FAILS
TO TRANSFORM ITSELF INTO A MAJOR POLITICAL PARTY,
IT MAY WELL INDICATE THAT TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PATTERNS
AND MODES OF BEHAVIOR ARE EVEN STRONGER IN THE COUNTY
AS A WHOLE THAN THEY WERE IN THE CA. END COMMENT
WYMAN

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